

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF GROTON OPEN SPACE ASSOCIATION, INC.

In Favor of Proposed Bill H.B. No. 5264, AN ACT PROTECTING MUNICIPALLY
ACQUIRED OPEN SPACE LAND

Environment Committee Public Hearing

February 18, 2009

Senator Meyer, Representative Roy and members of the Environment Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony in general support of Proposed House Bill 5264, An Act Protecting Municipally Acquired Open Space Land.

Groton Open Space Association (GOSA) is a volunteer, non-profit organization which has been active since 1967. We recognize the need and desirability of acquiring open space and to ensure protection of open space lands in perpetuity.

We were instrumental in the establishment of Haley Farm State Park in 1970; the designation of Bluff Point as a Coastal Reserve in 1974; in the promotion of a successful \$8 million open space bond referendum in Groton in 1988; and in the purchase ourselves, with the help of a state open space grant, of the 76-acre Merritt Family Forest in 2008.

Currently, municipalities or non-profit groups that accept state funds for the purpose of acquiring open space lands are required to sign a conservation easement in favor of the state specifying that the land will remain open space forever. This easement is recorded on the land records along with the deed. GOSA signed such an easement with the state for The Merritt Family Forest and was grateful to do so in order to ensure legally that the land would always remain true to the open space purposes for which it was purchased.

However, without the help of a state open space grant, lands acquired by municipalities for the purpose of providing open space, using local taxpayer funds authorized through a voter referendum, are not assured comparable protection in perpetuity.

For example, in our town of Groton in 1988 our open space bond referendum was approved by an overwhelming three to one majority of the voters appropriating \$8 million for the acquisition of six parcels of land. Funds were to be used "for open space, conservation, and recreation purposes and the entering into of covenants and agreements with owners of such land or interests therein to maintain, improve, protect, limit the future use of or otherwise conserve such land."

Yet, there was no reference or restriction included in the deeds to five of the six acquired parcels of land indicating the "open space, conservation, and recreation purposes" for which the properties were purchased.

We raise this point not as a local issue, but rather in the interest of general public policy and adherence to the principles of good governance. We believe that land purchased for open space purposes with municipal funds only should have the same protection as municipal lands purchased with the assistance of state open space grants. We ask that the Environment Committee address this issue of open space land protection and respectfully request your support of H.B. 5264, An Act Protecting Municipally Acquired Open Space Land.

If you require any further information, please contact

Priscilla Pratt, President

Groton Open Space Association, Inc.

P.O. Box 9187

Groton, CT 06340

Phone: 860 536-6376

Email: timothy.pratt@att.net